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Successful Weekend of Growth, Connection, and Chizuk for Nearly 800 Parents from Around the World

by Zalman Goldstein

It is said that pain shared is pain halved. Spending the final weekend of 2021 with nearly 800 parents from around the world at the *Keshar Nafshi* convention in Stamford, Connecticut, taught me that it can also be healing tripled, even exponentially so.

Coming together with so many other parents who are on the same journey, searching for guidance and inspiration while raising children who are struggling within the system and with Yiddishkeit in general, infused me with incredible *Chizuk*, healing, sense of brotherhood, and hope. Although participants hailed from every community—Chassidish, Litvish, Yeshivish, Sefardic—and from nearly every continent, the sense of unity, mutual understanding and non-judgmental acceptance was as palpable as it was validating and nourishing.

Top experts on parenting, child development, *Chinuch*, and mental health, such as the world-renown Rabbi Shimon Russell, Rabbi YY Jacobson, Rabbi Shais Taub, Rabbi Benzion Twersky, Rabbi Daniel Kalish, Rabbi Aaron Friedman, Binyomin Greenspoon, and others, gave generously and selflessly of their time throughout the entire weekend, offering their wisdom, warmth, and practical guidance through a variety of lectures, workshops, keynote addresses, and nonstop hours of private consultations into the wee hours.

The experience was as magical as it was healing. Being together with so many parents who all clearly share a deep sense of dedication and love for their children, mirrored back to each and every one of us a feeling of being less alone, less isolated, imbuing a sense of faith and hope that there is indeed a path forward, and that there's an ultimate purpose to each of our struggles.

As the weekend drew to a close, I invited fellow participants to share reflections about their

experience, to inspire and encourage each other, and so that others can learn about the amazing resource that is *Keshar Nafshi*. Here are several excerpts of what they wrote, shared with their permission:

"As painful as it is to see, when you spend a Shabbos with hundreds of people who are in the same boat, who understand you, it is comforting to know that we aren't alone. —**S.S.**

* * *

"For the first time since we began this journey, we did not feel as isolated or alone. We looked around at the men and women around us from all walks of life and were amazed at the number of people all committed to sharing and being together, to benefit our children who are struggling. That is what gave us strength."

—**A Keshar Nafshi Parent**

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"For me, one of the most painful parts of having our child veer from our family's path and traditions into a dangerous and painful one, is the feeling of being alone in this as a parent. Alone because the community does not understand what we are going through. Some even judge us as a bad parents and lay the blame at our feet. Alone because I don't know where to turn to find guidance that is possible to apply in real life. Spending Shabbos at the *Keshar Nafshi* event gave me a group of fellow travelers on this painful journey. Kind and loving people that understand and don't judge. People that cried with me in my pain and I was able to cry with them in their pain.

I'm no longer alone. *Keshar Nafshi* gave me a community that embraces

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me; that understands me and tries to help me. I don't feel so alone anymore." —**T.S.**

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"As parents of a child who has been struggling for years, we have felt the pain of confusion, desperation and loneliness. Being a part of Keshar Nafshi and all those associated with it has literally changed our lives and given us hope, clarity and connection as we continue on our journey together. We met many others who are in similar situations. Through the sharing of our stories and pain, we have connected in a very unique and comforting way. We no longer view our child's situation as hopeless, but as a special mission assigned to us by Hashem. —**Y.R.N.**

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"My experience at the 2021 Keshar Nafshi Shabbaton was life-changing. My takeaway is this: Hashem takes us through twists and turns in this journey of life. Sometimes I struggle to understand and sometimes Hashem *bentches* me with perfect clarity. I would never have thought at the time of my pain and struggles that my experiences could have had any kind of positive side to them. Over the years, I have seen time and time again, that nothing could be further from the truth. Everything I went through has a reason. This Shabbos was yet another powerful reason and obvious sign that nothing happens in Hashem's world by mistake. I'm glad I stuck around to see it through." —**Barry Lampert**

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and less judgmental of the world around us. In turn, our lives become happier, more fulfilling, and better than those who never had to undergo this challenge." —**B.**

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Rabbi YY Jacobson delivering remarks at the grand Melave

"As parents, we all want to do the best possible for our children. When things don't follow the regular path of Chinuch, we are faced with decisions some could ever imagine. Very few can even advise us confidently. I felt most inspired sitting in a room with hundreds of parents, *Rabbonim*, therapists and professionals, listening to hair-raising accounts of parents with selfless *mesiras nefesh*. And crying together with every single one of them. We felt each other's pain. And to top that off, I walked out of that Shabbos with the message: If we want to help our children, we must make ourselves into fitting role models, so we don't have to tell our children what to do, but let them see it, and when they're ready they'll follow it on their own. I now know I have a lot of growing to do before they can grow." —**E.C.**

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"The sessions were masterfully presented, the panels enlightening. There were so many lessons that we took home from the weekend. The other aspect that was so meaningful to us was meeting other parents experiencing the same journey. People were sharing advice, stories, pain and struggles all for the purpose of helping another Jew. To know there are *rabbonim*, *mechanchim*, and therapists who are there to guide, teach and help heal is so comforting. Walking away after this *Shabbaton*, it was impossible not to be a changed person." —**M.G.**

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"I learned the importance of letting go, bringing Hashem in, and



Rabbi Shimon Russell delivering a keynote address

"This was my first Keshar Nafshi Shabbos—so inspirational and so much food for thought. A takeaway I had: Hashem puts us through challenges in life to bring out middos and good parts of us we never knew we had. When one has a child who is struggling and we put our own ego and pain aside—which is not easy to do, and takes a lot of work—and we focus on their pain and we love them for who they are, not for who we want them to be, we become better people



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looking truly inward. These tools are allowing me to grow into a better wife, better mother, better sister, better neighbor and friend, but mostly to become a better me. *Keshar Nafshi's Shabbaton's* are really for all parents who want to learn real chinuch; be it for their struggling teens, their mainstream children, their married children, their marriage, and most importantly themselves." —**R.F.**

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Rabbi Aaron Friedman delivering remarks at the grand Melave Malka

"I never cried so much in my life. But these were tears of relief and release. I didn't realize how desperate I was for validation for my pain, for all I was going through, until this weekend. For recognition for how I'm keeping a regular house for seven other kids with this whole parsha hanging over us. I was hesitant to come because I felt like I heard it all already. But I went anyway, if only for the good food and break that I so badly

needed. At the end I didn't have time to sleep because I didn't want to miss a single lecture. The messages were so positive. I never before heard that we parents are *tzadikim* and *tzidkonnios*, dealing with so much. I thought we were failures. I didn't hear 'you need to do more, more, more.' I heard 'you guys are amazing, strong, selfless. Just the fact that you came here shows that your there for your struggling kid and want to change and give.' We're a team. A strong team that are getting through one of the hardest *nisyonos* that *klal yisroel* faces today." —**Anonymous**

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Keshar Nafshi is an organization that provides support and guidance for parents with children who are struggling with *Yiddishkeit* and related issues; learn more at www.KesharNafshi.org.

Zalman Goldstein has been writing on topics of Jewish interest for more than thirty years. He has authored over a dozen books, such as *Jewish Living Simply Explained*, *Going Kosher In 30 Days!*, *Talking Divorce*, and *The Shabbat Table Companion*. He is currently writing *RAISING A LOVING FAMILY*, a much-anticipated book on parenting psychology and guidance drawn from the talks and teachings of Rabbi Shimon Russell. Learn more at www.RaisingALovingFamily.com.



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